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C O N F I D E N T I A L SEOUL 003007

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TAGS: PGOV PREL KS KN ECON

SUBJECT: ROH SURPRISED BY DPRK ATTITUDE, BUT NO SURPRISES
IN SUMMIT DECLARATION

Classified By: POL M/C Joseph Y. Yun. Reasons 1.4 (b/d)

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) While the joint declaration from the North-South Summit contained no major surprises, President Roh was reported as being surprised by the level of suspicion in his meetings with the DPRK. The joint declaration included a DPRK commitment to denuclearization and a peace regime to replace the Armistice Agreement, but made no overt mention of the Northern Limit Line (NLL). The joint statement mentioned that peace regime discussions would be held between the "three or four" relevant parties, indicating the possibility of PRC exclusion from at least some of the discussions. The declaration included concrete follow-up steps with specific deadlines on a number of different types of exchanges, from the Prime Minister-level down to family reunions. The ROK achieved the inclusion of a number of its economic cooperation proposals in the declaration, as well as promises by the ROK to develop the DPRK's infrastructure. On optics and atmosphere, it has been widely reported in the media, and by Roh's own confession, that he received a somewhat chilly reception while in the DPRK; the actual face time between Roh and Kim Jong-il was far less than that between Kim Jong-il and then-ROK President Kim Dae-jung in 2000. The offer to extend the summit by a day, raised by Kim Jong-il, and the subsequent embarrassing decline by Roh indicated tensions in the personal relationship between the two leaders. Roh seemed to show his frustrations when he told the press that there was too much mistrust and fear of the South among the North Korean leaders. END SUMMARY.

DENUCLEARIZATION AND PEACE REGIME

¶2. (C) Denuclearization: The joint statement states that, with regard to the nuclear issue on the Korean Peninsula, the South and North agreed to work together to implement smoothly the September 19, 2005 Joint Statement and the February 13, 2007 Agreement achieved at the Six Party Talks. South Korean officials tell us that this was a battle, because the North Koreans preferred not to mention the Six Party Talks. Getting Kim Jong-Il on record as supporting the overarching Six Party agreements was, therefore, a significant achievement.

¶3. (C) Peace Regime: Peace regime language is placed just before the denuclearization language; it states: "The South and North both recognize the need to end the current armistice regime and build a permanent peace regime. The South and North have also agreed to work together to advance the matter of having the leaders of the three or four parties directly concerned convene on the Peninsula and declare an end to the war." Apparently, the South Koreans tried very hard to put the peace regime language in the same paragraph as the denuclearization language. Though they were unable to do this, they were able to put the two topics in adjacent paragraphs under the same section. MOFAT DG Cho Byung-je told us that the "three or four parties" language reflected an effort by the DPRK to exclude China from strictly military discussions.

SECURITY ASSURANCES AND ECONOMIC COOPERATION

¶4. (C) The declaration contains stronger-than-usual language on non-aggression and confidence building. The two Koreas also agreed not to interfere in each other's internal affairs. The declaration stated that the issue of unification would be resolved by the two Koreas and according to "the spirit of by-the-Korean-people themselves." The Defense Ministers would meet in Pyongyang in November to discuss military confidence-building measures.

¶5. (C) Several paragraphs were devoted to economic cooperation, mostly proposals for infrastructure projects to be built by the ROK. These would be significant if carried out: railways between Kaesong-Pyongyang and Kaesong-Sinuiju, shipyards at Ahnbyun and Nampo, expansion of the Kaesong Industrial Complex (KIC), the opening of a tourism site at Mt. Paektu, direct air service between Seoul and Mt. Paektu, a Special Economic Zone in Haeju, and the establishment of a cargo rail service between Munsan and Bongdong. The two sides also promised to provide aid in case of emergencies, and in particular natural disasters. The statement also specified cooperative projects in agriculture, health and medical services, and environmental protection, and called for increased exchanges.

THE ROK PUBLIC YAWNS

¶6. (U) TV viewing rates also showed that South Korean citizens were far less interested than in 2000 on what was happening at the inter-Korean summit. According to a survey conducted by TNS Media Korea, the average viewing rate on Oct. 2 for summit-related updates by KBS, MBC and SBS (the three major TV broadcasting companies in South Korea) added up to only 14.5 percent, a 5.8 percentage-point decrease from the 20.3 percent viewing rate on the first day of former President Kim Dae-jung's trip to Pyongyang back in 2000. On the other hand, the Oct. 2 TNS viewing rates also indicated that more people were interested in watching Roh's overland crossing of the MDL (27.7 percent viewing rate) than watching Kim Jong-il's surprise appearance later in the day at the welcoming ceremony for President Roh at the April 25 House of Culture (15.1 percent).

GNP CRITICAL

¶7. (U) The Grand National Party (GNP) -- the conservative opposition -- in an emergency supreme council meeting after the announcement of the Joint Declaration expressed its regret about the lack of substance or insufficient mention of key, issues including denuclearization, the POW/abductee issue, and military confidence-building in the joint declaration. GNP Chairman Kang Jae-sup expressed his disappointment with the fact that a commitment by Chairman Kim Jong Il to denuclearize was not reflected more clearly in the declaration. Other members, including GNP Floor Leader

Ahn Sang-soo, pointed out that the economic cooperation-related measures also lacked clarity, and it appeared that the South was giving a lot to the North in terms of economic cooperation but was not guaranteed much in return. However, Rep. Chung Hyung-keun -- the architect of the GNP's new, North Korea policy -- while criticizing the government's lack of achievement on the denuclearization and POW/abductee issues, complimented the ROKG's effort to work towards inter-Korean peace and to make the summit serve as a bridge to efforts toward peace by future administrations.

WHAT COMES NEXT

¶8. (U) The DPRK promised to hold separate Defense Minister and Prime Minister discussions in November, in Pyongyang and Seoul, respectively, to discuss implementation of the joint statement. The DPRK also agreed to exchanges between its legislatures, cultural representatives, and deputy Prime Minister-level officials. Family reunions would also be increased, and a permanent delegation of both North and South Korean officials would remain at the Family Reunion Center at the Mt. Kumgang site once the construction on the center was completed.

FROSTY ATMOSPHERICS

¶9. (C) The most bizarre incident on the summit's key middle day was when Kim Jong-il asked Roh, in front of the press and with cameras rolling, whether he would like to prolong the summit by another day. Roh, clearly surprised, and still on camera, delayed by saying that he would have to check with his staff. Kim Jong-il then chided him for not making the decision on the spot, but later, perhaps feeling slighted, withdrew the invitation as unnecessary. This sequence was shown repeatedly during that evening's South Korean news broadcasts, with commentators offering different interpretations. The media speculated that the invitation reflected concerns that the Arirang Festival, which Roh was slated to see that evening, might get rained out. An alternative possibility was that Kim Jong-il was probing to see if Roh was ready to have more of a relationship; perhaps the extra day would have included a one-on-one meeting or a "walk in the woods." In the end, the summit was not prolonged, and Roh attended the Arirang show (modified to remove the paean to Kim Il-sung and combat with South Korea) but Kim Jong-il did not.

¶10. (C) There were also questions about Roh's reaction. One of the reasons he may have hesitated is that Kim appeared to be suggesting delaying the substantive discussions for a day, and Roh felt pressure to show his domestic audience results. The conservative Chosun Ilbo newspaper editorialized that the abrupt Kim invitation was another example (along with moving the dates of the summit, not telling the ROKG that he would meet Roh on arrival until the last minute, and not attending either of the summit's dinners, including the one Roh hosted on October 3) of Kim disrespecting Roh. Dean of conservative columnists Kim Dae-joong, critical of Roh's overall performance in Pyongyang, said Roh's handling of the invitation was the one thing he got right.

¶11. (C) Roh also signaled that the private meetings on October 3 were frosty on a substantive basis. In front of reporters, he told his entourage that the North (presumably Kim Jong-il himself) had shown a deep-rooted mistrust of the South, particularly when the words 'reform' or 'opening' were used. Roh said the North was disappointed with KIC's slow progress, but was not comfortable with the South referring to it as an example of reform and opening, and therefore the South would have to work at showing more respect for the North Korean system. The Summit Declaration calls for further expansion of KIC, but it was not clear how Roh would respond to critics claiming that the North only approved the KIC for the money it brings in.

¶12. (C) Besides the awkwardness between the two leaders, another issue was how South Koreans interpreted Roh's comments during the summit. The liberal Hankyoreh newspaper, quite supportive of Roh's approach to North Korea, cited what it called "Roh's eyebrow-raising remarks" at the October 2 dinner. About an hour after his initial innocuous toast to host Kim Yong-nam, which called for peace and prosperity on the Korean peninsula, Roh reportedly went to the microphone again to say that Kim Jong-il and Kim Yong-nam needed to live long and happy lives to ensure inter-Korean peace and development. This addition was apparently in response to Kim Yong-nam toasting Roh's health, but the Hankyoreh raised questions about its impact.

¶13. (C) As seen on television, the summit showed Pyongyang treating Roh's visit as important (streets lined with onlookers, red carpet at the House of Culture, Kim Jong-il waiting to greet Roh and his entourage) but, as the media emphasized, lacking warmth (Kim Jong-il appeared to be going through the motions at the greeting ceremony, and then skipped several of Roh's events).

COMPARING SUMMITS

¶14. (SBU) How does this Summit Declaration compare with that from the first inter-Korean summit (June 15, 2000)? The June 2000 Joint Declaration focused on reunification, mentioned four times in one short page, compared to only once in the 2007 Declaration's two-and-a-half pages. The 2000 Declaration was conceptual (the only action items were agreement to hold more dialogue between authorities and Kim Jong-il's agreement to visit Seoul "at an appropriate time"), befitting a first meeting, whereas the current Declaration is a detailed action plan, raising the question of whether the Roh administration will have time to implement it. Lee Myung-bak advisor on North Korea policy Nam Sung-wook, a professor at Korea University, called it a "department-store arrangement with such a variety of things, and it makes me wonder whether they will all be carried out." Still, the outlines of the current Declaration's details can be seen in the 2000 Declaration, which called for, and resulted in, family reunions, economic cooperation, and further dialogue. The current Declaration, significantly, calls for increased exchanges in several areas, which was a provision of the 2000 Declaration that was never energetically implemented.

COMMENT

¶15. (C) There were no substantive surprises at this summit, no disasters and no home runs. The Korean public expected little to result from the leaders' meeting, and the awkwardness between the two seemed to bear that out. However, the ROK did well -- including with respect to USG equities -- in the summit declaration. If the measures described within the statement were to be carried out, they would constitute some of the most substantive achievements in the North-South relationship. Here, the calendar becomes a factor, and one has to remember past agreements (1992 Basic and Denuclearization agreements) that were never carried out.

END COMMENT.

VERSHBOW